

## **It Hurts Until It Doesn't by EvieSmallwood**

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** maxine mayfield character study, stax bonding, these two would make lovely surrogate siblings

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Steve Harrington

**Relationships:** Steve Harrington & Maxine "Max" Mayfield

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2017-12-14

**Updated:** 2017-12-14

**Packaged:** 2022-04-03 14:47:58

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 1,925

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

She's nothing like him. She just needs to be reminded, sometimes.

## It Hurts Until It Doesn't

“Go to hell, Steve!”

It was like watching fire spread, the way her hair looked when she moved. It whipped through the air, wild, curled in all the wrong places. The car skidded out of the gravel and onto the road. Steve brought the can to his mouth. He swallowed the last of the beer and wondered what the hell it was he'd done, and how exactly he was going to fix it.

---

She was nothing like him.

It was a fact. It was something she knew in her heart. She knew it, and she felt it. There was no doubt in the statement, which she made tentatively and quietly. Her breath fogged up the mirror.

“I'm nothing like him.”

Max sighed and pulled back, staring down at her hands. They were submerged in murky, slightly bloody water.

---

*“Get the fuck away from me!”*

*“Oooo, look at her, James, she's trembling!”*

*Max glanced between them, watched as their grins turned to sneers and their eyes glazed over. A chill ran down her spine; all she could think was, Something bad is going to happen.*

*And it was.*

*Troy stepped forward, switchblade on hand as always. Max had lost count on how many times she'd stolen old ones, sometimes just to give him a little trouble—other times to protect her friends. She hated that he hadn't been caught with it yet. She hated that none of the teachers seemed to notice how much of a bully the stupid douche was.*

*All of the sudden, Max was angry. Horribly angry—the kind of anger she so rarely experienced; it made her breaths so quick it all seemed to be one long gasp, and her back rigid. She balled her fists and matched Troy’s fighting position with ease. “I said go away, and I meant it, you son of a bitch.”*

*“What are you gonna do, Max? You gonna fight me?”*

*She didn’t miss a beat. “Of course not, Troy, but I will kill you.”*

*Something in the back of her mind screamed that this was wrong, that saying anything like that was wrong—but another part of her knew that no matter what she said or did, what they wanted was much worse than anything she was capable of.*

*Talk was talk. Max had seen the real Troy, and he was... insane.*

*James backed off, as he always did when his best friend fought. Troy took a step forward, lunged, and the rest...*

---

*“Max! Open up, it’s me.”*

*Max jumped. She pulled the stopper and watched the water drain, before drying her hands and jerking open the door.*

*It was El; curly hair hastily brushed and piled on top of her head, eyes wide, holding her backpack in one hand. “Are you okay?”*

*Why can’t I be like you? “Fine. You should go home.” Max brushed past her into the living room. She grabbed the abandoned paper plates, beer cans, and napkins, throwing them all in the trash. El followed her with a furrowed brow.*

*“You’re not fine,” she concluded after a moment or so. “You look like shit.”*

*“Thanks.”*

*“Max,” El grabbed her wrist. Max dropped the pizza box she’d been holding. Crusts and sauce splattered all over the floor.*

“Damn it, El!” She ripped away and crouched down, feeling her eyes begin to sting at the sight of her best friend jumping in fright. “Why do you *always* have to try and help?!”

El knelt beside her, slowly picking up the mess. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to—”

“No, it’s...” Max sat back. She stared at her hands, at the splattered red flecks on the tile, and started to cry. *I’m so fucking stupid, just so stupid. I should just die. All I do is mess everything up.*

Cold fingers intertwined with her own. Max sobbed. She couldn’t see their hands, but she could almost feel everything El was trying to say in her touch. “I’m sorry,” she whispered.

Before she knew it, El was wrapping her arms around Max and pulling her close. “Don’t be. Bad things happen, you know that. But we get over it, right?”

“Yeah. Right.”

---

He flew back into the gravel, but it wasn’t long before Max was on top of him; crouching over him like some rabid dog and punching the shit out of his face.

*This isn’t you this isn’t you this isn’t*

“—me go! Let me go!”

There were arms around her stomach. She was being pulled. For a wild moment she thought it was James, but then she remembered he’d already split. Max managed to squirm out of the hold.

“Calm down, kid.”

She whirled at the sound of his voice, and all at once the same crept in. It spread like poison through her body; burning in her stomach and weakening her limbs. He wasn’t supposed to see her like this. Not ever again, not after Billy.

“Go away,” she hissed. Her voice was raspy. It didn’t belong to her

mouth.

Steve stepped back. He looked genuinely surprised and it broke her heart (*as if I have one*). “Max—”

“Just go, Steve!”

She shoved him.

*Fuck. What am I doing?!*

“Max, come on—” he was reaching for her wrists, just like she had always done with Billy when she knew a blow was coming.

Max crumpled. She wanted to cry but she couldn’t. Instead she whirled on Troy. “Get lost!”

Troy scrambled to his feet, wildness in his eyes. “You’re fucking crazy —”

“Go! Now!”

He grabbed his bike and took off, giving her one last look. The blood on his face matched the shade of his sweatshirt.

“You gonna tell me what that was about?”

“Oh, shut up!” She stormed past him, back to the BMW he’d passed down to her. “I don’t need your therapy, okay? Sometimes... sometimes you don’t know everything.”

“No? Then explain it to me.” His voice was genuine, but it held a challenging edge. Max watched as he settled against the hood of his police cruiser, folding his arms over his chest.

“You don’t get it.”

“Don’t get what?”

*“Anything.”*

“Bullshit, I get you.”

“Yeah?” She rolled her eyes. “When’s my birthday?”

Steve’s eyebrows rose. He started to laugh. “W-What? What does your birthday have to do with—?”

“When is it?”

“October 16th,” he grinned. “When’s mine?”

With that, she shrugged. *Exactly*. “I don’t know.”

His face fell. Steve wet his lips, looking out at the road. “So what’s your point? I don’t share enough with you? I know I’ve told you that. Hell, Max, we’ve celebrated it. Kind of.”

“The point is...” she bit her cheek. “Do you have any beer?”

“You’re a minor.”

“So?”

“Yeah, alright, good point.” He circled his car and popped the trunk, procuring a half-gone six pack. They took two, and drank in silence for a few minutes.

“So what’s the point?”

She scuffed the rocks with her shoe, watching the dust curl up and fall again. Abruptly she downed the last half of her beer and crushed the can. “Thanks, Steve.”

“Wait—Max—”

Somehow—blame his legs—he managed to get to her car door before she did. “Max, hold on. Tell me what’s going on, okay? I can help. I’ve helped before, right?”

“This time you can’t,” she snapped, reaching for the car door handle.

“Max—”

“You can’t, okay!? You can’t help! I can’t tell you!”

“What?! You tell me everything—”

“Get off my car—”

“Maxine, for fuck’s sake—”

“Go to hell, Steve!” She pushed him away and hurriedly ducked inside. He stared at her with absolute shock, but how could she blame him?

*I’m nothing like him.*

“Max!”

---

“Max, come on! Open up!”

She sagged against the door, closing her eyes. *What did I do? How do I fix all of this?*

“Max! I’m not mad, okay? I just wanna talk.”

It took all of her strength to unlock the door. She shoes away from it, settling down on her bed as it opened. Steve was in the hallway, with El not far behind. They both looked worried. Of course they did.

*You did this. You’re just like him.*

The tears on her cheeks were burning. “I’m sorry,” she said. It was all she could think to say.

Steve shook his head. He sat down heavily on the bed beside her and grabbed her hand. “It’s okay. People make mistakes—”

“No, I mean... I’m sorry you have to put up with me and my crazy fucking mood swings. I’m sorry I’m...” the words got stuck in her throat. She swallowed hard. “I’m sorry for always being a horrible person.”

“You are not—”

“Yes I am!” She shot to her feet and found herself slamming her

bedroom door closed to block El's view. Max could faintly hear El gasping in shock through the thin panel of wood. "I suck, Steve! Face it!"

He looked at her like she was eating shit. "What are you talking about?!"

"I'm—I'm not like you, okay? I'm not a good person. I don't do good things, I'm not nice, I don't care about anyone else. The reason I don't know when your birthday is, is because I didn't give a fuck enough to remember."

Steve winced. "That's bullshit."

"No it isn't! I'm just like him! I'm just like Billy and *everyone* knows it!"

"But you're not!" Steve shot to his feet. "God, Max, you're not... you're not anything like him."

"It doesn't matter," she shook her head, because it really didn't; none of this did. One day Steve would realise how bad she was, and then he'd leave like everyone else did. "You don't understand."

"What don't I understand? That you're alone? Fuck that, Max, you think everyone doesn't feel that way?! The two people I love are off living it up in New York while I'm stuck here—and I fuck up all the time. At work, at home, Jesus, with you..."

She wiped her cheeks furiously. "You didn't do anything."

"Neither did you," he said. "Well, I mean, you kicked the shit out of those kids—but they deserved it, so who cares?"

"I care! I can't go—go beating people up whenever I feel like it! I can't ruin everything I have but I keep doing it and I don't know how to stop!"

All at once he wrapped her in his arms. She didn't want to hug him back, but she did anyway, sobbing into his chest. *How can I be so stupid? What am I doing?*



Steve pushed her hair from her eyes. “You’re *not* him. You’re nothing like him. And for the record, I started hanging out with you because you remind me of myself, so cut the crap, Max. I love you, okay, kiddo? And I’m not going anywhere.”

“Even if I beat you up?”

Steve laughed. “Listen, if I ever screw up so bad that you wanna hit me, you have my full permission to murder me in cold blood.”

Max snorted, but Steve sobered. “You’re not like that and you know it. You’re good.”

“Not as good as you.”

“Well, not everyone can be an angel sent from heaven, Max. It’s a gift.” They both laughed. Max felt like her chest was melting. “You’re not as good as me; you’re better.”

Max bit her lip. There was nothing but sincerity in his eyes, so she supposed if he believed it, she’d have to, too.

*Thud!*

They both jumped, but shortly after came El’s soft, worried voice. “Can I come in? I wanna give Max a hug.”

### **Author’s Note:**

So, this was written pre-season two, and looking back, I’m surprised at how accurate it was. I’ve only tweaked it just slightly to make sure everything is canon compliant. Anyway, I hope you enjoyed! Please give feedback and/or kudos <3